

OCT 19 1972

## The bombs won't work

To the general bulk of our knowledge, or ignorance, of what is going on in Vietnam there have now been added two new sources of information which need, we think, to be examined and weighed seriously and carefully.

Richard Dudman of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and Peter Arnett of the Associated Press have both been touring North Vietnam. They are both conscientious, careful reporters known and respected in their profession. Both saw much the same things — the Hanoi-Haiphong area and a trip down the line from Hanoi to Nam Dinh, which is the main textile producing center of the country.

Their observations confirm each other. They prove one thing. In the area they visited, only a small slice of the whole of North Vietnam, people were busily engaged in keeping the military supply line working and, seemingly, doing it successfully and in high morale in spite of the bombing.

Nam Dinh itself was a shambles, its big buildings mostly bombed out and useless. But the machinery had been taken away and scattered among homes and villages before the bombs fell, or pulled from the wreckage afterwards. The train runs regularly between Hanoi and Nam Dinh. The daily bomb craters are all filled in time for the regular run.

Wherever the two reporters went they saw large quantities of ammunition and other war supplies along the open highways, under trees. Long lines of trucks park by day under the trees — roll along at night. There is no evidence of food or fuel shortages. Consumer goods come out of village or backyard or roadside improvised plants.

In other words the bombing has scattered the people and their daily activities, but not interfered seriously with the productiveness of the community. It continues to be able to push the daily quota of war supplies down the supply route to the war front in the South.

This evidence is incomplete. The two reporters did not see the whole country. They do not know how much of the materials pushed into the country from China reach their destinations. But it does confirm evidence from other sources that the bombing has not been able to shut down North Vietnam as an exporter of

nam from the outside world. Both Pentagon and the CIA estimate that the trade has been cut down by about half. But is this reduction (if true) due to the bombing or to Henry Kissinger's diplomacy?

American military intelligence has consistently failed to note any large buildup of supplies in China, north of the Vietnam border, or anywhere inside North Vietnam, as could be expected if

the bombing were holding up supply lines. If we can infer from this that it is Henry Kissinger's Peking-Moscow diplomacy which is cutting off supplies, then the bombing can only be regarded as the most wasteful operation in the annals of warfare, in both human and material terms.

Under these circumstances, the only possible justification for continuing the bombing is one of diplomatic tactics, not of military strategy. That reason would be the genuine conviction on the part of the White House that Hanoi is at, or very close to, the point of coming to terms at the bargaining table. Under these circumstances, it could be argued that a bombing halt would be interpreted by Hanoi as a sign of weakness, causing it to back away from imminent accord. That is one possibility. But there is another viewpoint, as expressed in two dispatches from Paris carried in this newspaper last Friday, which argued that the peace talks are at stalemate and, indeed, that Hanoi is already planning a new offensive.

If the White House knows something that nobody else knows, then its bombing tactics should justify themselves in the appearance shortly of a peace settlement. But White House sources are already reported to be hedging by saying privately that a settlement will not come before Election Day, November 7. Which leaves the average American citizen in the same quandary that he faced before Election Day 1964 and 1968, both as regards presidential promises of peace in Indo-China and rationalizations for bombing of North Vietnam. The needle is stuck in its groove, and the question is whether to wait and hope it jumps the track, or to get up and change the record.